

VZCZCXRO3181
PP RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #2899 2411339
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 291339Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3084
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS BAGHDAD 002899

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: CHOLERA OUTBREAK IN THE KURDISH REGION

¶1. SUMMARY: Over the past two weeks there has been a rise in illnesses with diarrhea and vomiting in Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. The Kurdistan regional Minister of Health estimates that there are a total of 4,000 new cases since the middle of August. Of these cases, 70 have been confirmed as cholera (23 in Sulaymaniyah and 47 in Kirkuk.) GoI measures are in progress to handle the outbreak. MNF and the US Embassy are assisting. END SUMMARY.

Preliminary Reports

¶2. Dr. Sherko Abdulla, Director General of Health, Sulaymaniyah Province, reported that over the past two weeks there has been a rise in illnesses with diarrhea and vomiting in Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk, 2,000 cases and 1,925 cases respectively. Laboratory tests have confirmed 70 cases are cholera, 23 in Sulaymaniyah and 47 in Kirkuk. Of the 47 Kirkuk cases only 2 have been confirmed as cholera by the Central Baghdad Public Health Lab. Six deaths have resulted. There is also one unconfirmed case of cholera reported in Salah ad Din.

¶3. Chronic food and water infrastructure problems, along with seasonal or warm-weather diarrheal disease outbreaks are cited in an August 26 Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center (AFMIC) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessment as possible causes of increased cholera cases.

Iraqis Respond

¶4. The Iraqi Ministry of Health (MOH), without U.S. assistance, dispatched a team from the Public Health Directorate and delivered additional fluids and drugs to the North. Additionally, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh has met with representatives from the United Nations (UN) who have arranged to send an assessment team from the World Health Organization (WHO). In addition, the International Medical Corps (IMC), a USAID implementing partner, has been in Sulaymaniyah since August 28, 2007, to assist in providing technical assistance in cholera management. The IMC is taking on an integral part of the emergency coordination room that has been established by the Kurdish MoH. Significant support is also provided by UNICEF in the form of equipment, medical supplies, and water purification kits.

¶5. The Kurdistan Minister of Health, Dr. Abdul Rahman Yones, has requested investigational technical assistance from Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I) and has requested Multi-National Corps-Iraq (MNC-I) to provide additional guidance on public health measures that can be implemented. The MNC-I Office of the Surgeon General will provide technical assistance, but not conduct the actual investigation. MNF-I has created a "ready to assist" operational order to be released when appropriate.

Coalition Response

¶6. In partnership with the Iraqis, the United States Mission Iraq (USM-I) and coalition forces have formed a team to coordinate assistance efforts in managing these cholera situations. Assistance will come in three parts; supplies and equipment needed to manage the outbreak; a public information campaign to help stem the rate of infection; and technical expertise in handling the cases of cholera and investigating the cause of contamination.

Comment

¶7. COMMENT: The Iraqi Ministry of Health acted swiftly to move fluids, equipment and medicine to the Kurdish region, once help was requested by Kurdish officials. They have kept in contact with the USM-I and requested assistance when needed. While it's worth noting that field training for Iraqis regarding this very topic, outbreak investigation and control, is slated for no later than March 2008, it is promising to witness Iraqis demonstrating their willingness and capacity to take the lead. END COMMENT.